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The Golden Era of Hollywood: The Making of *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*

By Kalie Rudolph

Beginning in the late 1920s, Hollywood's Golden Era was magical. People traveled from near and far to try to make it into show business. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, better known as MGM, was the top studio of the era and strove to produce the most successful films in the business. This was the most glamorous studio and had contracts with the biggest stars, as reflected in their slogan, "[MGM has] more stars than there are in the Heavens."^[1] Despite this prestige, however, the studio heads were clueless as to what films the public wanted to see. Every film they released was a gamble. In 1939, MGM released two of the most beloved and popular films of all time, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*. Both films, even today, remain high on the American Film Institutes top 100 films; *Gone with the Wind* at number 6, and *The Wizard of Oz* at number 10.^[2] However, despite studio backing for both films, *Gone with the Wind* was a huge success where the *Wizard of Oz* was a box office flop. To explore how Hollywood worked during its magical decades and the insecurities of this business, it will be useful to look at how the studio chose these two films, the obstacles and challenges throughout production, and management's response to both of these films at the box office. MGM took many risks to release *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* in the hopes that they would be rewarded with great box office success; in neither case were they sure of its success.

Appeal of the Story

MGM heavily relied on big budget productions during its golden era of the 1930s. However, the studio was shaken up after the death of Irving Thalberg in 1936; studio head Louis B. Mayer was desperate to find another right hand man, a producer that had the creativity and focus to take on numerous productions at a time. Mayer had no luck finding a producer that could live up to Thalberg's talent and had no alternative but to hire diverse producers to oversee the many projects of the studio. During that time, former MGM honcho David Selznick began his own production company, Selznick International Pictures (SIP). Upon announcing the opening of SIP, Selznick stated "There are only two kinds of merchandise that can be made profitably in this business, either the very cheap pictures or the very expensive pictures...there is no alternative open to us but to attempt to compete with the very best."^[3] Independent studios like SIP relied on the major studios for use of studio space, staff, and their first-run theatres for releasing pictures. This partnership between the independent and the major studios proved critical to producing and releasing top quality pictures.

Shortly after SIP began its independent productions, Selznick received word from his New York assistant Katherine Brown about the newly released book, *Gone with the Wind*, urging him to buy the rights to make it into a film. Selznick replied to Brown on May 25, 1936 where he wrote, "if we had under contract a woman ideally suited to the lead, I would probably be more inclined to buy it than I am today...To pay a large price for it now in the hope we could get such a star and-or further hope [the] book will have tremendous sale, I feel, unwarranted...But I do

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not feel we can take such a gamble."^[4] The following day, Selznick wrote Brown stating, "want you to note that I have thought further about *Gone with the Wind*' and the more I think about it, the more I feel there is [an] excellent picture in it."^[5] Selznick later recalled that the change in thought about purchasing *Gone with the Wind* came after he discovered that his friend and colleague, Jack "Jock" Whitney, sought to purchase it for Pioneer Studios. That was just the push that Selznick needed. Selznick bought the rights to Margaret Mitchell's novel for \$50,000 in July. After he purchased the rights to the Civil War novel, Selznick read the book for the first time while on vacation in Hawaii. Just as the public throughout the nation fell in love with the story, Selznick did as well. He knew that he could make a successful film out of *Gone with the Wind* as long as he could find the perfect cast.

At the same time, another film began its development stages. MGM, the top of the major studio system since the late 1920s, had a high standard to live up to, making the best films possible. Mayer was constantly on a mission to find new and exciting stories to make into films. Due to the immense box office success of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), studio producers searched for similar fantasy stories to make. MGM director and producer Mervyn LeRoy persuaded Mayer to buy the rights to *The Wizard of Oz*. Since the *Wizard of Oz* was a similar fantasy to Disney's first full-length feature, MGM hoped it would be as big a sensation, or perhaps even bigger. Mayer bought the rights for the picture from colleague Sam Goldwyn for \$75,000 on June 3, 1938.^[6] LeRoy later recalled, "Mr. Mayer bought the book for me. I wanted to make a movie out of *The Wizard of Oz* from the time I was a kid."^[7] LeRoy and Mayer hoped that audiences would want to see a big production film of this loveable childhood classic.

Through the 1930s, Hollywood mainly produced feel-good movies where the audience could escape from their troubled lives and enter a magical world where there is always a happy ending. Both MGM and SIP believed that their films fit this standard and people would enjoy watching them. *Gone with the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz* both had characters to whom audiences could relate. Scarlett O'Hara appealed to those affected by the Great Depression because of the hardships she endured through the South's reconstruction period; and through all that, she never lost her courage or determination. People of that era could also connect to Dorothy Gale because she was a Kansas farm girl who wanted to escape to a better place, somewhere "Over the Rainbow." Despite both films having winning characters, and lavish studio support, *Gone with the Wind*'s success greatly surpassed that of *The Wizard of Oz*.

The Producers

During Hollywood's golden era of the 1930s, studio producers were the essential element in making films. The studio heads could not possibly run the operation and supervise each picture throughout production, especially since the major studios at the time were releasing roughly 40 pictures per year. They had to rely on their producers to oversee operations on the ground level of the studio and most importantly manage the budget for the films. Film analyst Leo Rosten, once said, "Each studio has a personality; each studio's product shows special emphases and values. And, in the final analysis, the sum total of a studio's personality, the aggregate pattern of its choices and its tastes, may be traced to its producers. For it is the producers who establish the preferences, the prejudices, and the predispositions of the organization and, therefore, of the movies which it turns out."^[8] Working alongside the studio heads, producers supervised an annual budget for the pictures, coordinated the operations of the studio, negotiated studio contracts, established stories and scripts, and oversaw the films' editing until it was ready for release. Without its producers, studios would have had a much more difficult time releasing successful films.

After the death of the prestigious Irving Thalberg, Mayer struggled to find another producer of the same caliber. His search ended in 1937 when he hired former Warner Brothers director and producer, Mervyn LeRoy. Mayer started LeRoy on a weekly salary of \$6,000, more than any other producer at the studio.^[9] In his first year and a half at MGM, LeRoy produced four of the studio's top assignments, including *The Wizard of Oz*. MGM lyricist Arthur Freed begged Mayer to allow him to become a producer, and like LeRoy, Mayer granted Freed his promotion to assistant producer. When Mayer purchased the rights for *The Wizard of Oz* in 1938, both LeRoy and Freed had their eye on producing it. Mayer budgeted the picture at \$2.5 million, more than any other MGM picture, which greatly raised the stakes for its success. With the large budget for the film, Mayer was not about to put his novice producer Freed on the project alone, and placed LeRoy as the film's producer and Freed as LeRoy's assistant. The two producers complimented each other perfectly. LeRoy handled the technical aspects of production, mainly focusing on direction, camera work, and special effects, while Freed spent most of his time working on the music, art direction, set design, and costuming.^[10] Both LeRoy and Freed had been friends since 1923, and their friendship enabled them to have a trusting relationship throughout the production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Since they both knew each other's strengths, there was an assurance that their tasks would be done to the best of their abilities.

Unlike MGM, which had dozens of producers on staff, SIP had only one producer, Selznick himself. There were both pros and cons to having only one producer for the studio. Selznick could be involved in all aspects of production. He felt that "in the making of good pictures," it was so essential for a producer to collaborate on every inch of script, to be available for every conference, and to go over all details of production."^[11] However, those who worked with Selznick often had a difficult time dealing with his disorganization, need to achieve perfection, and his obsessions with constantly wanting to rewrite and reshoot scenes. Studio employees became frustrated with Selznick's demands for perfection, but it also made them respect him that much more when his studio shifted to make fewer films at a higher budget and with more producer supervision. His staff knew that his main desire was to produce the highest quality pictures. Selznick took his time completing pictures since he did not have to worry about a certain number of films he made per year. He once explained, "A producer can only find and put over new personalities when he has patience, and the money for overhead, and the authority not to be rushed into making his judgments."^[12] Selznick knew that he could make *Gone with the Wind* a huge success if he had an adequate amount of time to execute it.

A studio is only as good as its producers. The producers were the backbone of the studio. The success of a picture lay on the producers' shoulders, and if the film was unsuccessful, he potentially cost the studio millions of dollars. With that said, the producers were the sole author of their film and made it the way they wanted it. LeRoy, Freed, and Selznick collaborated with their staff to create films that encompassed their vision. Their input is visible throughout both films' production, from the initial writing of the screenplay to the final editing. Without these three men, MGM would not have been able to release two of the most acclaimed classics in film history. Despite these producer's enormous control, power, and incredible knowledge about the film business, none of these producers could guarantee their film would be a hit.

The Scripts

With the rights to both films purchased by MGM and SIP, the next step was to write an adaptation of the books. Both studios aimed to make the screenplays as close to the original as possible, knowing that the public would be looking for this. However, this was no easy task. Both *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* went through numerous drafts in the studio's attempt to perfect the stories in a visual manor so they could be captured on film. In the case of *The Wizard of Oz*, it was especially nerve-racking to adapt the classic Frank Baum book into a

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screenplay after LeRoy learned, "at the time that the publishers estimated that more than ninety million people had read one or more of the *Oz* books."^[13] With *Gone with the Wind*, Selznick was not sure if Margaret Mitchell's book would be as triumphant as it was expected to be; that changed in the early stages of writing when over one hundred letters poured into the studio recommending parts to famous actors. LeRoy and Selznick aspired to keep the story as precise to the books as possible in order to satisfy the audience.

Efforts to stay true to the classic book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, proved problematic early on. Le Roy assigned Herman Mankiewicz in February 1938, the first of ten screenwriters to work on the screenplay. In his first draft, Mankiewicz wrote about half the story taking place in Kansas and half in Oz. This placed too much emphasis on exposition and not enough on the fantastical adventure through Oz. Dissatisfied with his work, LeRoy replaced Mankiewicz with Noel Langley. Langley made the most progress on the adaptation; he had the idea that the Scarecrow and Tin Man would appear as farmhands in Kansas, as well as Miss Gulch, who would transform into the Wicked Witch of the West.^[14] In his draft, the Cowardly Lion only appeared in Oz and did not resemble the farm hand Zeke. At first, LeRoy and Freed were not enthusiastic about those concepts, but after Langley argued "that you cannot put fantastical people in strange places in front of an audience unless they have seen them as human beings first,"^[15] they began to see Langley's point. It was Langley's idea to remove qualities (a brain, heart, and courage) of the farmhands when they emerge in Oz as the Scarecrow, Tin Man and eventually the Cowardly Lion. In the Kansas sequence, Hunk (the Scarecrow) tells Dorothy "Now lookit, Dorothy, you ain't using your head about Miss Gulch. Think you didn't have any brains at all...Well, your head ain't made of straw you know."^[16] Because Hunk undermined Dorothy's intelligence, in her dream, she took away his brains for questioning hers. That of course, posed the biggest problem of the Langley drafts, the fact that Dorothy's trip to Oz was in fact a dream and not a reality like it was in Baum's story.

It is near impossible not to change some aspects of a book to make it film worthy. Langley was well aware of that, as were LeRoy and Freed. One of the main things that Langley decided to alter was the Wicked Witch of the East's shoes. In the book the shoes were silver, but Langley thought the shoes would film better in Technicolor if they were a brighter color, like ruby.^[17] Langley also thought that Dorothy should be an older character in the film, rather than a young child, which was how the character was portrayed in the book. He reasoned that an older Dorothy would be more sympathetic to audiences and would better compliment the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion. Langley finished his fourth draft of the script on May 14, 1938, on which LeRoy put "Do not make changes," and it was deemed the temporary script.^[18]

LeRoy still thought the screenplay needed some work in tying Dorothy into more of the action in Oz because she appeared as more of a sub-character than the protagonist. He hired several more writers to help resolve the adaptation's main flaw, including Florence Ryerson and Edgar Allan Woolf. These two writers cleared up the script so that it adhered more to the original book. Ryerson and Woolf inserted more emotion into Dorothy's character and her journey to get back home to Kansas. Freed had the idea to bring Dorothy home by having her say "There's no place like home."^[19] By October 1938, the screenplay was finished. After ten writers worked on the project, LeRoy believed that audiences would be satisfied with the adaptation they completed. It was clear, however, that no single one of those gifted artists had been able to single handedly create this script.

In the case of *Gone with the Wind*, Selznick wanted the screenplay to be as close as possible to Mitchell's novel. It would prove to be a demanding task trying to fit much of the plot of the thousand-page book into the script, all while limiting the viewing time to an extent that audiences would be able to sit through. Selznick thought that writer Sidney Howard would do an excellent job at adapting the screenplay, as he explained that Howard was "rare in that you don't have to cook up every situation for them and write half their dialogue for them."^[20] Howard

agreed to tackle the immense project on the grounds that he stay at his home in Massachusetts and work from there. Selznick feared leaving his writer on the other side of the country to create the picture's script, claiming, "I have never had much success with leaving a writer alone to do a script without almost daily collaboration with myself and usually also the director."^[21] He accepted Howard's request, however, and told Katherine Brown that, "anything you can do to make Howard available for conference with us during the actual writing of the script will, I think, be safeguarded."^[22] Selznick wanted himself and his director, George Cukor, to be fully involved in the script's writing process to ensure that it was as close to the original book as possible.

Selznick and his crew had one goal for the screenplay, the film's historian Wilbur Kurtz stated, "we started with the idea to stick with the story."^[23] Selznick sought to make the dialogue literally one hundred percent of Margaret Mitchell's words. He was adamant about this and in a letter to Cukor, Selznick expressed, "I am also double checking against the book once more and substituting valuable lines wherever I can for ordinary lines in the script."^[24] By making the dialogue purely Mitchell's writing, Selznick hoped it would detract from the loss of many scenes from the book. Due to *Gone with the Wind*'s immense length, a large portion of the book had to be cut out. Selznick noted, "I think there is only one policy to follow in concluding what we can and cannot retain and that is, that we must retain scenes that are essential to the story, and lose scenes, however valuable, that are not essential."^[25] The process of adapting the screenplay was a long and laborious process that took just over three years to finish, but Selznick was confident that audiences would be pleased with the script's accuracy to the book. Again, the process of creating the script was a long and troubled one, despite the involvement of some of Hollywood's top talents.

The Screenplay is one of the most important aspects of any film; to put it simply, no script, no film. For screenplay adaptations it is crucial that the script is reflective of the original stories, especially if they are well known, which was the case for both *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*. LeRoy and Selznick knew the key to the film's success was to keep as close to the original story as possible. LeRoy proclaimed, "we wanted to make L. Frank Baum's story as nearly as possible as he had written it, but we wanted to cling to all the reality and the philosophy of the story...The story is a classic, and when nearly ten million copies of such a book have been sold, that many readers can't be wrong. Those who love the story of Dorothy and the land of Oz will not be disappointed."^[26] Both pictures relied on the story's authenticity for the hope of its success, but in neither case was this guaranteed.

Casting for *The Wizard of Oz*

Every studio and producer knew the importance of a good cast. The actors in a film could easily make or break the success of the picture. The bigger the star in a picture, the more likely it would achieve greater returns at the box-office success. When it came to creating a star and promoting star appeal, MGM was the studio that perfected it. Mayer recognized early on that a main element in the studio's success lay in the big-name actors since they were the ones that draw the public to theatres to see the actors' latest movie. Once Mayer realized that, he concluded that in constructing its own stars, MGM would execute more control over these individuals' careers, and even their private life, in order to present a certain image of them, making them more prominent.^[27] In spite of this method for star quality, MGM and SIP chose to cast unknown actresses for the leading roles in *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*. In casting these actresses in the lead roles, MGM took a big risk in releasing both films.

Casting was a tedious process for any film, but with *The Wizard of Oz* being the studio's biggest production, Mayer, LeRoy, and Freed knew that they had to choose the perfect cast for it to even be considered a semi-successful picture. They aspired to cast its actors based on similar personality or emotional ranges to those of the character. Mayer, LeRoy, and Freed contemplated long and hard about what MGM stars should be assigned to such unusual

roles. They concluded that with the considerable amount of physical comedy needed, actors with a background in vaudeville were better choices. Vaudeville stars would be able to perfect the elements of comedy, which would expand the film's appeal to more adults, who were also familiar with vaudeville stars.

The producers began their casting search with the supporting roles of the Tin Man, Scarecrow, and the Cowardly Lion. In March 1938, LeRoy cast Roy Bolger in the role of the Tin Man. Bolger was thrilled to be a part of the film, but he was upset with the role he was to play; he expressed "I loved the thought of being the Scarecrow, and I could not imagine anyone else playing the part."^[28] To his dismay, Buddy Ebsen would play the Scarecrow. Bolger complained about his role as the Tin Man, but LeRoy did not pay much attention to Bolger's dissatisfaction because Bolger was an MGM employee and if he was cast for part, he had to play it whether he liked it or not. That MGM rule applied to all employees of the studio, no matter how big the contracted person's weekly salary was.^[29] Even though Bolger was a big star, he still had to follow the rules. However, he was so adamant about wanting to play the Scarecrow that he went to Mayer's office and pleaded with him until he got the role. Bolger argued that he would make a much better Scarecrow than Tin Man since "I'm not a tin performer. I'm fluid."^[30] Bolger and Ebsen's roles were switched; Bolger would play the Scarecrow and Ebsen would be the Tin Man. The search for the Cowardly Lion ended when the film's lyricist E.Y. "Yip" Harburg recommended Bert Lahr. Harburg had previously worked with Lahr, and he was convinced that he could write lines for Lahr that would embrace a burlesque comedy style while at the same time display the sweetness behind the lion. LeRoy agreed with Harburg's recommendation, and believed that Lahr exuded a kind of animalistic humor that was ideal for the role of the Cowardly Lion.

When Mayer purchased the rights to *The Wizard of Oz*, he and MGM President Nicholas Schenck imagined Twentieth Century Fox's child star Shirley Temple as the role of Dorothy because of her incredible success at the box-office.^[31] Temple was also closer in age to the character in Baum's book. Schenck ordered the film's musical supervisor, Roger Edens to visit Fox studios and listen to Temple sing to a live audience. Edens reported back that the child star had too many vocal limitations that would ultimately hinder the film's music.^[32] After casting Bolger, Ebsen, and Lahr for the supporting roles, LeRoy and Freed felt that they needed an older and more mature actress for the part of Dorothy; they both saw the studio's own Judy Garland. LeRoy recalled, "I always wanted Judy Garland. On account of her voice. On account of her personality. She *looked* more like Dorothy than Shirley Temple did."^[33] Moreover, when Mayer attempted to negotiate with Fox studios to borrow Temple for the film, the studio declined his request. The loss of Temple led Mayer to cast Garland for the role, on the condition that she lost weight prior to filming. Casting Garland in such a pivotal role was a large step towards MGM's goal to make her a star, but it was also a big risk for the studio, given that she was hardly a top-billed star at that time.

The producers had a difficult time finding an actor who gave the perfect performance of the Wizard. Given the perplexity of the role, a common man disguised as a wizard, LeRoy wanted to find someone that could portray the vulnerable side of the character. He anticipated finding an actor for the role outside of the studio. His first choice for the Wizard was comedian Ed Wynn. When Wynn read an early draft of the script, he claimed the part was too small and he declined. The early draft he read only had the Wizard in two scenes and the role of Professor Marvel had not yet been created.^[34] Freed was eager to cast W.C. Fields for the part, and even had the Wizard's monologue changed to incorporate Fields' cynical style. Fields declined the role after MGM offered him \$75,000 because he believed he deserved \$100,000.^[35] The producers did not consider Frank Morgan for the part until Morgan begged to do an ad-lib screen test. LeRoy consented to the ad-lib test, and it was then that he found his Wizard. Morgan added the perfect balance of sincerity and vulnerability to make the Wizard into a loveable character.

LeRoy and Freed had a problem finding the Wicked Witch of the West because the two producers could not agree on how to present the villain. Since the wicked witch in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was swanky and seductive, LeRoy wanted that same concept for the Wicked Witch of the West. Freed and some of the other producers objected and thought that the witch should be ugly and evil looking. Ignoring the other executives on the project, LeRoy set out to cast Gale Sondergard for the part of what he wanted to be a glamorous Wicked Witch. Sondergard recalled "I suppose Mervyn got to remembering that this was a classic by now, and the children who read it were going to say, That isn't the way it was written.' And everybody agreed that you could not do that to *The Wizard of Oz*."^[36] After LeRoy changed his mind about having an attractive evil witch, Sondergard dropped out of the role because she did not want to make herself ugly. LeRoy and Freed found character actor Margaret Hamilton who did not mind appearing hideous for the part. Hamilton made the idyllic Wicked Witch and is listed by the American Film Institute as the fourth greatest on its list of screen heroes and villains.^[37] Once the producers agreed on how to present the Wicked Witch they had to find someone completely opposite of Hamilton to play Glinda the Good Witch of the North. They searched for an actress who countered the evil of the Wicked Witch with pure goodness and innocence. LeRoy and Freed had eight potential actresses for the role, and luckily for them, it was a unanimous choice to cast Billie Burke.

The most challenging roles to cast for *The Wizard of Oz* were not of the supporting cast, but rather the secondary characters like the dog Toto and the 124 Munchkins. The search for Toto took the longest to cast, in part because the studio's Property Department had a difficult time deciphering the dog breed from W. W. Denslow's illustrations in the original book. LeRoy also had to find a dog that was calm and took good direction. The studio sent copies of Denslow's illustrations of Toto to numerous animal trainers nationwide in the hopes that one of them had a dog that resembled Toto. Dog trainer Carl Spitz stumbled upon one the ads MGM sent and took his Carin terrier, Terry, to the studio. The executives immediately agreed that it was Toto. To cast the Munchkins, Freed found Leo Singer, who managed Singer's Midgets. Singer provided most of the Munchkins for the film, who ranged from 2'3" to 4'8" in height.^[38] The studio hoped to acquire two hundred Munchkins, but Singer struggled to find even one hundred little people who were willing to be in the film. LeRoy had to make due with 124 individuals with little or no acting experience.

Casting for *The Wizard of Oz* took 7 months and proved to be a time consuming and tedious experience. Mayer, LeRoy, and Freed searched through hundreds of actors, within and outside the studio to find the perfect cast. The executives believed that a cast could make a box office sensation or it could make it a flop. They took an enormous gamble in casting Judy Garland, an unknown, for the lead role. Mayer sought to publicize Garland every chance he could to make her a familiar name before the release of the film. The cast produced a weekly salary of over \$13,000; Terry the dog made the least at \$150 per week, followed by Garland with \$500, and Bolger with the highest weekly salary of \$3,000.^[39] The studio was willing to risk a high weekly salary for its actors with the thought that the film's success would make up for the high production budget of the picture.

Casting for *Gone with the Wind*

As complex as the casting process was for *The Wizard of Oz*, Selznick had to overcome more obstacles when casting *Gone with the Wind*. Due to the fact that SIP was a small, independent studio, there was a smaller staff and even fewer numbers of actors under contract to the studio. Thus, Selznick had to search outside his studio and negotiate with major players in order to obtain the actors he wanted. While Selznick aimed to cast a big named star for a picture, major studios dismissed his request to borrow their stars because they were considered a studio asset and the companies preferred to cast their actors in their own films. Selznick knew that the key to the film's

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potential success lay in obtaining an impeccable cast, and the instability of knowing whether he would be able to borrow actors from other studios greatly jeopardized the potential success for the film.

Even before Selznick purchased the rights to *Gone with the Wind*, or read the soon to be released book, he pondered about his perfect cast. His first notion was to cast Ronald Colman in the lead, adding in a memo "Spent late last night talking stories with him (Colman) and found myself selling him this story. He seemed very interested indeed."^[40] In the same memo, Selznick considered Miriam Hopkins or Tallulah Bankhead for the part of Scarlett. His enthusiasm to find his exact cast allowed him to have the patience required for his long journey ahead in pre-production.

It was not until the studio purchased the rights for the film in late July 1936 that Selznick realized the mayhem he had gotten himself into. Once he made the deal with Margaret Mitchell, Selznick took a cruise to Hawaii where he finally read *Gone with the Wind*. When he returned to the studio, Selznick was greeted with hundreds of letters from people nationwide, suggesting actors and actresses they thought to be perfect for the lead roles. The studio received 121 letters just on recommendations for the part of Scarlett, including Katherine Hepburn, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck, and Lucille Ball.^[41] The public's choice for the role of Rhett was more unanimous. A studio poll taken in 1936, found that 98% of the people who wrote in letters saw Clark Gable as Rhett Butler, followed by Gary Cooper and Ronald Colman.^[42] Due to the astonishing public opinion SIP received, Selznick felt the casting pressure more than ever.

Not only were letters pouring into SIP, but Mitchell also received numerous letters about casting for Scarlett and Rhett. Unsure what to do with the incoming flood of letters, Mitchell wrote to Katherine Brown, head of the studio's story office in New York, to inform her of the casting suggestions she received. Brown responded, "my own personal theory is not to put a well-known actress in as Scarlett as everyone will be bound to say she is Katherine Hepburn, or Margaret Sullivan, or Joan Crawford playing Joan Crawford, and not Scarlett O'Hara. My feeling is that if we have a completely new person audiences will be more generally satisfied that she is their conception."^[43] Brown's proposal to cast a fresh-faced actress for the lead was quite a risk for the studio, but as she believed, audiences would be more pleased with an unknown actress.

Selznick was well aware that casting Scarlett would be the most difficult project stating, "The pressure for haste on *Gone with the Wind* was severe, but I knew that seventy-five million people would want my scalp if I chose the wrong Scarlett, and that there was no agreement on who, among all the girls in pictures, was the right Scarlett."^[44] Selznick turned to journalist Russell Birdwell to head a national search for Scarlett O'Hara. In this search, Birdwell published locations of where auditions would be held in order to have a larger selection of unfamiliar actresses. Selznick put his director George Cukor in charge of conducting the auditions throughout the country. The search for Scarlett took just over two years. Despite this time and effort, the hunt was unsuccessful, so Selznick focused his attention on casting the other roles.

Selznick and his staff went in search for an actor to play Rhett. By January 1937, they narrowed the search down, as Selznick described, "Cukor and I jointly feel that the choice is in the following order: 1. [Clark] Gable. 2. Gary Cooper. 3. Errol Flynn."^[45] The hope of getting Gable for the role ended in late March when MGM refused to loan out one of its biggest stars to SIP. Selznick tried to work out a deal with Warner Brothers to loan out Flynn. The negotiations between SIP and Warner Brothers turned ugly when Warner announced its production of *Jezebel* (1938), which was a similar Civil War story and used the publicity of *Gone with the Wind* to promote their southern film. Selznick confronted Harry Warner, President of Warner Brothers, furiously claiming, "Certainly, there can no longer be any question on this fact since Jack [Warner] is actually quoted, and since the publicity material from

your studio goes so far as to say that around the studio Bette Davis is now known as Scarlett.'" [46] Selznick was infuriated by Warner Brothers' attempt at gaining publicity for their film by the public promotion of *Gone with the Wind*. That resulted in Selznick not wanting to cast Flynn in the role after the fiasco with Warner. Little progress had been made on the picture, and SIP still lacked their leading characters which put the production way behind schedule.

SIP used a large amount of the film's budget for the national search for Scarlett, where travel expenses, man hours, and test scenes rapidly began to add up. Selznick was adamant about making this film at whatever cost. He argued "I am aware that we can spend a lot of money unnecessarily on the picture. On the other hand, if done perfectly, can almost with certainty return an enormous profit, in my opinion; and which, if cheated on, can cut down these potential profits substantially." [47] It was clear that SIP did not have enough money for such an elaborate and costly film. As luck would have it, Mayer called Selznick with an interest in the film and wanted to buy the rights. MGM struck a deal with SIP; MGM would supply half of the budget for the picture, \$1,250,000, have full releasing rights, and half of the box office take. [48] The negotiations made between the two studios immensely aided the production of *Gone with the Wind*. Selznick wrote, "from my personal standpoint, I could probably make [this] picture with less trouble there [MGM] and, indeed probably make a better picture with their resources than with our own." [49]

Selznick also had access now to the best of the best at MGM, from the top quality cameras to the biggest names in show business, and most importantly, Gable. Part of the deal made between SIP and MGM was that in addition to providing half of the film's budget, MGM would also allow them to cast Gable as Rhett. However, Gable did not want the part and turned it down. Gable recalled, "He [Selznick] pointed out that no actor had ever been offered such a chance. There had never been a more talked-of role than Rhett. That was exactly the reason for turning it down." [50] He felt that he could never live up to the public's expectations of Rhett, and would only disappoint audiences with his portrayal. Mayer made a deal with Gable; he knew that Gable wanted a divorce from his wife Rhea in order to marry his long time mistress Carole Lombard. If Gable agreed to play Rhett, Mayer would pay his current wife three hundred thousand dollars to divorce him. [51] Being the Don Corleone of MGM, Mayer knew that he made an offer Gable could not refuse. Gable was signed for the role in August 1938, securing the public's top choice for Rhett.

Selznick also had a difficult time casting for the role of Ashley. Since October 1937, he had his eye set on Leslie Howard for the part and began negotiations with Howard and his manager, Mike Levee. In an attempt to be as persuasive as possible, Selznick pointed out "to Levee with complete accuracy that Howard had been a box-office failure in all of his pictures in recent years without exception." [52] Selznick hoped that his statement would entice Howard to accept the role to improve his career, assuring Howard that *Gone with the Wind* would be a success. Howard was not the least bit interested in playing the part of Ashley. The only worry Selznick had of Howard was in regards to his age; there would have to be a lot of make-up done to him to make him look younger than his 46-year-old self. By October 1938, Selznick did not have any other prospective actors in mind as Ashley and still aimed to cast Howard. He noted, "there is nothing in connection with *Gone with the Wind* that is as much of a worry at the moment as the casting of Ashley." [53] Selznick was able to think of a propelling bargain for Howard to accept the role; Selznick offered him a producing position on *Intermezzo* (1939), acknowledging Howard's long time desire to produce. [54] Howard consented to the role, although he remained bitter about it throughout the filming process. He strongly disliked the character, about which he wrote, "I have the damn part...I'm not nearly beautiful or young enough for Ashley and it makes me sick being fixed up to look attractive." [55] Selznick cast the only actor he envisioned as Ashley, and he bet that audiences would feel the same way.

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The search for an actress to play Melanie reached its high point in November 1938 with only two months left until filming was set to begin. One of the top players on Selznick's list was Olivia de Havilland, who was under contract to Warner Brothers. De Havilland learned of the SIP production of *Gone with the Wind* and thought that she would be taken as a more serious actress if she played the role of Melanie. She asked Warner to be released from the studio in order to audition for Selznick. Warner refused on the basis that if she was not Scarlett she could not be released. Adamant about the role, de Havilland risked her contract to Warner Brothers and auditioned anyway.^[56] Selznick was thrilled by her audition and later wrote, "Certainly I would give anything if we had Olivia de Havilland under contract to us so that we could cast her as Melanie."^[57] Selznick attempted to negotiate with Warner for a loan out of de Havilland, however Warner declined. De Havilland turned to Warner's wife in order to persuade him to loan her out to SIP and to her surprise, Warner allowed her to be cast in the film.^[58] Selznick was one step closer in obtaining his ideal cast.

Scarlett became the longest and most frustrating search for Selznick. The nationwide quest for the character was a failure and did not result in any unknown actresses for the part. There were a handful of potentials for the role, including Paulette Goddard, Jean Arthur, Joan Bennett, and Katherine Hepburn, although none of them dramatically stood out to Selznick. By October 1938, Selznick still anticipated finding the perfect Scarlett and expressed, "I am still hoping against hope for that new girl...If we finally wind up with any of the stars that we are testing we must regard ourselves as absolute failures at digging up new talent."^[59] Production was far behind schedule, so in order to save time and money, Selznick wanted to tear down some old sets on the studio's back lot to make room for sets required for the new film. The burning of the sets would also be used as the burning of Atlanta scene in film. The scene was filmed on the night of December 10, 1938, using stunt doubles for the characters Rhett and Scarlett. As Selznick recalled in a letter to his wife, "Myron [Selznick's brother, a talent agent] rolled in just exactly too late, arriving about a minute and a half after the last building had fallen and burned and after those the shots were completed. With him were Larry Olivier and Vivien Leigh."^[60] He continued, "Shhhhh: she's the Scarlett dark horse, and looks damned good. (Not for anybody's ears but your own: it's narrowed down to Paulette [Goddard], Jean Arthur, Joan Bennett, and Vivien Leigh.)"^[61] After approximately two years of searching, Selznick had found his Scarlett; he cast Leigh as the lead on December 25, 1938 and signed the contract January 6, 1939. Leigh was largely an unknown actress in the United States and had only done a few films in England prior to her being cast as Scarlett O'Hara.

The cast of *Gone with the Wind* was released to the public on January 6, 1939 after the long wait. Selznick stood by his casting decisions when many journalists questioned him as he cast an English woman as Scarlett, the southern belle. In his defense, Selznick stated, "Scarlett O'Hara's parents were French and Irish. Identically, Miss Leigh's parents are French and Irish...Experts insist that the real Southern accent, as opposed to the Hollywood conception of a Southern accent, is basically English."^[62] Selznick believed he had acquired the perfect cast; the unknown actress as Scarlett paired up with Gable, and the supporting cast of de Havilland and Howard. Despite the criticism from reporters, he trusted that the public would have the same opinion and would be delighted with the casting choices.

The Directors of *The Wizard of Oz*

The studio system worked very differently in its golden era then it does today. At that time, producers were the ones fully in charge, not the directors. Directors were replaceable and often were replaced. Major studios like MGM made and released films through an assembly-line production process where a collaborative effort was needed to create the film the way the producer wanted. Film theorist Andrew Sarris explained, "the director became the employee, and the man who had time to attend to the business details became the head of the

studio."^[63] A director who tried to insert his input was often fired and replaced by one who would do exactly what the producer wanted. Both films, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*, had several different directors; *The Wizard of Oz* had a total of four and *Gone with the Wind* had three. It is amazing that the films were ever finished due to the changes in leadership. It was a challenge for the producers to find directors that would turn their vision for a film into a reality with minimal arguments. Therefore, it became crucial for LeRoy and Selznick to obtain a director that shared similar ideas and who worked well with them.

After Mayer rejected LeRoy's plea to direct *The Wizard of Oz*, they both agreed on Richard Thorpe to direct the picture. When Thorpe accepted the project in September 1938, he was limited in the extent of what decisions he controlled. The script had already been written and the cast had been chosen, which simply left Thorpe to shoot the picture. However, Thorpe would only work on the film for two weeks before he was replaced. After two weeks of filming, Thorpe had already shot several scenes, including the meeting of Dorothy and the Scarecrow and all the scenes that took place in the Witch's castle.^[64] When LeRoy watched the footage that Thorpe had shot, he was horrified by what he saw. LeRoy fired Thorpe because "he didn't quite understand the story. He just didn't have the... the warmth or the feeling. To make a fairy story, you have to think like a kid."^[65] To avoid questions from the press about Thorpe's exit from the project, MGM released a statement that simply noted Thorpe was ill.^[66] LeRoy had to find a director that not only understood the film's story, but would also share a similar vision of how to film it.

Desperate to find a replacement, LeRoy placed George Cukor as temporary director while he searched for a permanent one, since Cukor was assigned to direct Selznick International Picture's *Gone with the Wind* in a few days. Cukor agreed to look at the footage Thorpe had shot and try to figure out the problem with the scenes. He too was appalled at the footage Thorpe filmed. Cukor's major contribution to the film was altering the appearance of the costumes, most notably Dorothy's.^[67] In the footage he saw of Garland, Cukor felt that she "looked doll-like; the makeup too heavy."^[68] She appeared too artificial to be a farm girl from Kansas. In Thorpe's footage, Garland was wearing a blonde wig, which Cukor immediately took off, and he removed the majority of her makeup. In addition to adjusting Dorothy's appearance, he also directed her acting. Thorpe had Garland acting much older and more sophisticated than a rural farm girl would be. Cukor instructed her to incorporate innocence in the character and repeatedly told her to remember she was "just a little girl from Kansas."^[69] In just a few days, Cukor changed Dorothy's appearance and transformed her into the character everyone is familiar with today.

Just as Cukor left to work with Selznick, LeRoy found Victor Fleming to take over as director for the film. When LeRoy approached Fleming asking him if he would direct *The Wizard of Oz*, Fleming had no desire to take on the project. It was completely different than the action films he usually directed. Despite his lack of interest in the film, Mayer assigned him to the picture. Once he stepped on set, Fleming was amazed at the light-hearted atmosphere, and he quickly found enjoyment within the film. Fleming worked hard to direct the picture and wanted to make it for his daughters.^[70] He was able to go into a child-like state of mind to obtain the imagination required for the film. LeRoy felt that he had found the director he needed for the picture, explaining, "Fleming, always a great director, had that fantasy touch we needed."^[71]

Just as production was going according to plan, LeRoy encountered another dilemma. Mayer pulled Fleming off the film to be lent out to Selznick in order to replace Cukor as the director for *Gone with the Wind*. In mid-February 1939, Selznick called MGM director King Vidor, informing him of Cukor's departure from *Gone with the Wind* and requesting Vidor to look at the film's script and help find a possible substitute director for Cukor.^[72] Vidor recalled, "But over the weekend without telling me Selznick had made a deal with Mayer to get Fleming. Because Clark Gable asked for Victor. So David asked me if I would take over *The Wizard of Oz*. I was so relieved to get out

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of undertaking *Gone with the Wind* that I said, Sure. That'll be great." [73] Fleming shot all the scenes in Oz, which left Vidor to complete the Kansas sequence and any retakes needed, taking approximately three weeks to finish. Vidor did not receive any credit for the film; he explained "...I did not want any credit, and as long as Victor [Fleming] was alive, I kept quiet about it." [74]

The Wizard of Oz became a collaboration between LeRoy, Freed, and the four directors who worked on the picture. The only reason the film was completed was because of LeRoy's vision and his ability to enforce his vision onto the directors in order to make the film coherent. The directors were merely a replaceable aspect of the major studio system, just like writers, actors, and other crewmembers. Thorpe, Cukor, Fleming, and Vidor did their part to complete LeRoy's film, each participating in the assembly line production process. Fleming was the most influential director on the film, not only because he worked on the project the longest, but also because he was able to work well with LeRoy, enabling them to generate ideas together. Even though the relationship between producer and director could create either a successful film or a total disaster this film managed with an ever-changing roster of directors, some with problematic styles.

The Directors of *Gone with the Wind*

Selznick International Pictures had a different approach when it came to working with their directors. Since it was a small, independent studio, Selznick aspired to have his directors as involved throughout the production process as he was. He believed that he could produce better pictures if both he and the director were engaged throughout the project as opposed to having pictures made through an assembly-line production process like that at MGM where it did not really matter who was assigned to direct. Selznick usually did not intervene with his directors while they were filming since he enforced his control in all aspects of pre-production; there was a mutual understanding of exactly what Selznick wanted. [75] His biggest obstacle was hiring a director that would work well with him. It was no secret in Hollywood that Selznick was a control freak and that he became obsessed with the films he produced. He was a very difficult person to work with, which contributed to the hiring of three different directors to work on *Gone with the Wind*. Selznick had to find a director that complemented his controlling and obsessive tendencies in order to produce what the head of the studio would call an A-class picture.

Shortly after Selznick purchased the rights to *Gone with the Wind*, he approached Cukor to direct the film. For Selznick, it was important to hire a director before any other stage in pre-production, so that the director would be as involved in production as he was. However, Selznick and Cukor had a rocky relationship from the start. Beginning in the fall of 1936, Selznick had Cukor search for possible actors for the picture, and if Cukor saw potential in an actor, he was instructed to set up a test scene to send to Selznick. [76] In addition to shooting test scenes, Cukor took matters into his own hands and began negotiating with the actors he filmed. After Selznick learned of his director's compromises with certain actors, he wrote Cukor demanding, "I would like to suggest that under no circumstances should you send script scenes or discuss test scenes with anyone we have under consideration for *Gone with the Wind*", until the proper papers have been signed; and of course you should spend no time with rehearsals, etc., until papers are signed." [77] By August 1937, Cukor spent around \$1,150 of the film's budget on test scenes, many of which were filmed in both black and white and Technicolor. [78] Despite Selznick's need for complete control on his films, he let Cukor's actions slide in the hope that that would be the end of Cukor's attempt to exert dominance over him.

The relationship between Selznick and Cukor did not improve, and the deeper the film was in its production, the more conflicts arose between them. Cukor continued to be adamantly stubborn about doing things his way. When the screenplay was almost completed, Selznick wrote Cukor informing him, "Now, Sidney [Howard] and I are both

extremely worried that all this painstaking work is going to be largely in vain unless we have a pledge from you now that you won't use the book during the course of production to add three lines here and four lines there, as has been done in the test scenes."^[79] Selznick feared that the number of lines that Cukor inserted in the test scenes would eventually add up to an extra thousand feet of film, which would cost the studio even more money and corrupt the script. By late September 1938, Selznick was near the end of his rope with Cukor. In a confidential letter to his colleague Dan O'Shea, Selznick communicated, "I have reluctantly, and at long last, come to the conclusion that that we have simply got to do something, and promptly, about the Cukor situation. I have thought that George was a great asset to the company, but I am fearful that he is, on the contrary, a very expensive luxury...regardless of his great abilities..."^[80] Instead of replacing Cukor with another director, Selznick decided the whole issue could be resolved if he placed more limitations on Cukor, which mainly left Cukor to continue doing test scenes.

The restrictions Selznick placed on Cukor temporarily solved the issue until filming began. Once this commenced, several other cast members had difficulties with Cukor and his different vision for the picture; most notably Gable, since he felt that he had the most to lose if he did not live up to Rhett's character. This escalated when Selznick and Cukor got into an argument on February 5 while shooting Melanie's birthing scene. Cukor wanted the scene to be frantic and agitated while Selznick wanted the birthing scene to be calm; when the producer wants the scene a certain way, he gets it. After the first ten days of filming, they only had 23 minutes filmed, ten of which had to be reshot. Cukor thought the script was to blame and gave Selznick an ultimatum that either the script be rewritten or he would quit. Losing the battle of wills, Cukor left the film. On February 12 Cukor and Selznick issued a statement stating, "as a result of a series of disagreements between us over many of the individual scenes of *Gone with the Wind*, we have mutually decided that the only solution is for a new director to be selected at as early a date as is practicable."^[81] Leigh and de Havilland were crushed when Cukor quit because they had grown very attached to him and were especially fond of the way he directed them.^[82] De Havilland later recalled, "after George left the film, every now and then I would come across a scene I didn't know quite how to handle, and I called George and said, Can I come and see you?"^[83] Cukor helped de Havilland throughout the film. She went on to say, "I felt really bad about this illegal thing I was doing! I thought, It's not nice to have a secret like this from Vivien.' I told George. And he said, Why?' She was doing the same thing. She went up to his home every weekend and went over all the scenes with him! His influence was there straight through the film."^[84]

After Cukor quit, Selznick had to scramble to find another director before the film's production got too far behind schedule. The film's historian, Rudy Behlmer, discovered that "Louis B. Mayer kept trying to convince Selznick to use Victor Fleming, Jack Conway, or Woody Van Dyke, all under contract to MGM, to direct the picture rather than George Cukor, under contract to Selznick."^[85] Mayer believed that since his studio was much larger than Selznick's, he had the best of everything, including directors. Once the production was left without a director, Selznick turned to his first choice, Fleming. Mayer took Fleming off *The Wizard of Oz* immediately to start work on Selznick's film. After Fleming read the film's script, it appalled him and he thought that he could not make a decent film with that script. Selznick agreed with Fleming, and as a result he shut production down on February 16 for a few weeks so that he and Fleming could work day and night to perfect the script.^[86]

By April, Fleming was not only working on *Gone with the Wind*, but also tending to post-production tasks on *The Wizard of Oz*. As a result of working on both films, the director became frail and weak. In a panic, Selznick wrote to some of his staff members noting, "I have for some time been worried that Fleming would not be able to finish the picture because of his physical condition. He told me frankly yesterday that he thought he was going to have to ask to be relieved immediately, but after talking with his doctor was told that it would be all right for him to continue." Selznick went on explaining, "he is near a breaking point both physically and mentally from sheer exhaustion that it

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would be a miracle, in my opinion, if he is able to shoot for another seven or eight weeks."^[87] If Selznick had to shut down production for a few weeks while Fleming took time off, the studio would lose millions of dollars since the cast and crew were still on payroll and had to be paid even if the film was on hiatus. Both Fleming and Selznick feared that Fleming would have to be replaced in order to recover, and negotiated who would take Fleming's place for the rest of the film.

Sure enough, Fleming walked off the film on April 29th from a nervous breakdown.^[88] He announced, "I went to work on *Gone with the Wind* with the headaches of pure imagination from *Wizard of Oz*' still ringing in my ears."^[89] Unlike before when Cukor quit the film, Selznick was prepared for Fleming's exit and had a back up plan set up just in case. Sam Wood was to step in as director until the film was finished or until Fleming recuperated. With little preparation before arriving on set, Wood conducted himself well with Selznick and the cast. Selznick was confident in Wood's ability to direct and stated, "Sam Wood seems to have taken over beautifully and I don't think there is going to be any letdown in quality."^[90] After two weeks of rest and relaxation, Fleming came back to work in mid May. In order to speed up the filming process, Selznick had Wood stay on set as the second director until the picture was finished. With Fleming and Wood working on the film, Selznick had the two directors shoot simultaneously to speed up filming, but also to obtain the best quality scenes.

Just as *The Wizard of Oz* was a collaborative effort, *Gone with the Wind* was a group effort as well, and it took the input of a number of talented people to complete the film, some of them with conflicting visions of what the final product should look like.

Filming

After the scripts were written, the cast chosen, and the directors picked, pre-production was finally completed. The next step for *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* was filming. Although the filming process is generally a shorter length of time than other aspects of production, it is the most hectic part. MGM and SIP faced many difficult decisions throughout filming that they believed could make or break their films. Since LeRoy and Selznick were clueless as to what guaranteed a film's success, they had to make some of the toughest choices that could potentially put their careers and the studios in jeopardy. Their goal was make the audience feel a part of the picture, and if executed correctly, they knew the films would be a hit. Many complications arose throughout the filming process, ultimately placing more pressure on the producers to make the right call. During the filming of *The Wizard of Oz* LeRoy recalled, "I found myself working eighteen hours a day as I had to sift through questions from makeup men, set designers, writers, directors, everybody. They all wanted answers and that's what the producer must supply...he's the one that has to make the decisions, with the help of the director."^[91] Despite the high-risk decisions that the producers encountered on a daily basis, LeRoy and Selznick were determined to not let anything stand in their way to make these pictures the best they could be.

On the set of *The Wizard of Oz*, LeRoy had a daring idea to do something for the film that had never been done before, thus causing more difficulties in filming. He thought that the scenes when Dorothy is in Kansas should be filmed in black-and-white, and the scenes in the land of Oz should be in color. The picture was the first to use color for psychological reasons. This risky move for the film was "heralded as the most ideal use of color in motion picture history, *The Wizard of Oz*' is declared the first to make use of Technicolor on a sound, psychological basis."^[92] To combine imagination and reality, LeRoy wanted to emphasize the difference between Dorothy's conscious mind and her subconscious; the best way to illustrate the different state of minds was by use of color. As ingenious as this plan was, it was not without its glitches. LeRoy later recalled, "it created huge problems."^[93] Shooting the scene where Dorothy walks out of her house after landing in Oz was the most difficult part. LeRoy

explained, "what caused the biggest difficulty was the actual moment of transition. Each frame of film had to be hand-painted to make the change from black-and-white to color a smooth one."^[94] The crew had no idea if this would work, but they were determined to take the risk to try to accomplish something that had never been done before.

The producers for *The Wizard of Oz* not only had complex tasks to agree upon, but in addition, they also had to lead the way for the numerous special effects the film required. The most complex and costly effect in the film was the tornado. LeRoy had the studio's special effects technician Buddy Gillespie come up with a way to make a tornado. Gillespie had very little knowledge of how a tornado worked and relied on experiment after experiment to create a realistic natural disaster. The first cyclone he designed cost the studio \$8,000, and when it came time to shoot the scene, the tornado cast out of rubber failed to twist like a realistic twister and was scrapped.^[95] LeRoy remembered Gillespie constantly brainstorming and one day, "he took a lady's silk stocking, strung it up, and twirled it around with a fan to give it a blowing look. That shot of the Kansas cyclone in *Oz* is just a silk stocking."^[96] To make the tornado as accurate as possible, LeRoy and Gillespie decided to build a miniature set that included the farmhouse, barn, and picket fence, all on a three quarters of an inch scale. The thirty-five foot cyclone, which was considered to be miniature, was attached to a gantry crane at the top of the tornado so it could travel across the sound stage. At the same time, the cone of the tornado was fastened to a car under the sound stage where it could be operated by crewmembers.^[97] It cost over \$12,000 to construct a successful cyclone for the film's pivotal scene, but LeRoy, Freed, and Mayer did not oppose the hefty price for they knew the decision for the realistic cyclone would make their picture all the more epic.

On the set of *The Wizard of Oz*, a horrific accident took place while filming which forced LeRoy to make profound choice about the film's future. After only nine days after filming began, Ebsen was hospitalized after having an allergic reaction to the aluminum dust that was used for the tin man costume. After hearing about Ebsen's hospitalization, the studio was far less then pleased. Ebsen stated, "It seemed they [MGM] couldn't understand that an actor could get sick. They were furious. Mervyn LeRoy kept calling the hospital saying, he can't be in bed. He's due on the set.' And Jack Dawn [make-up artist] called me to tell me I couldn't possibly be sick because he had used aluminum dustpure aluminum dust' on my face."^[98] As his doctors explained that Ebsen would be in recovery for six weeks, LeRoy had to decide to replace his Tin Man or to hold up production until he was ready to work again. He chose to hire Jack Hailey as a replacement, even though it meant having to reshoot scenes and rerecord songs with the new Tin Man. If LeRoy had waited for Ebsen to recuperate, MGM would have to continue to pay the weekly salaries of everyone working on the production and the film would be way behind schedule, also costing the studio more money. LeRoy was forced to make a tough call that could jeopardize the film, but he believed what he did was in the film's best interest.

Just as LeRoy sought to do something that had never been done before in *The Wizard of Oz*, Selznick and Fleming also wanted to do something revolutionary with *Gone with the Wind*. While Selznick and Fleming were rewriting the film's script after the departure of Cukor, Fleming came up with an idea to build a large crane to shoot an extravagant scene of Scarlett amongst the wounded Confederate soldiers. He wanted a dramatic shot where Scarlett is lost in a never-ending sea of wounded men. A shot like this had never been done to this level prior to Fleming's plan. It took a great deal of preparation to execute an extraordinary scene like this one. Selznick, Fleming, and the production team decided, "in connection with he pull-back shot on the wounded, it has always been our intention to pull up and back. As a matter of fact, while we are going up approximately 45 feet, we are going back approximately 50 feet, or slightly more."^[99] This posed as a great risk for film because there were no camera cranes that would extend to the length they saw fit. SIP had to either build a large enough crane, which would be very costly, or they could improvise with some other devise that would enable them to obtain the shot.

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There was no guarantee that either of these solutions would work, but Selznick chose to rent a contractor's crane. The crane was 85 feet long and weighed 120 tons; this was the biggest camera boom ever used for a film.^[100] The pull-back shot, was a gamble for the picture, but Selznick made the difficult decision that he thought was a necessary.

Selznick made another bold move during the filming that could have banned the film from being released, and thus confronted the censors on the famous line, "Frankly, my dear I don't give a damn." Selznick went against the Production Code Administration head Joseph Breen's instructions to change Rhett's line from "damn" to "care." Selznick fought to keep the perverse word in the film claiming, "he [Rhett] has taken such a beating from Scarlett that I think it would be the most puerile sort of ending to negate everything that has preceded it by bringing them together, and I did not succumb to this temptation, despite the coaxing of many Hollywoodites."^[101] In a desperate plea to allow the forbidden word, Selznick wrote to Will Hays, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, explaining, "it is my contention that this word as used in the picture is not an oath or a curse. The worst that could be said against it is that it is a vulgarism, and it is so described in the *Oxford English Dictionary*."^[102] Selznick won the battle with the censors, and received permission to leave "damn" as is. This was a huge moment in film censorship. Selznick's decision to fight for the word paved the way for a gradual increase in swearing for future films.

While filming *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*, the studios endured many difficult decisions that greatly affected their films. It was no easy task for the producers to settle on how and when to do things. They did what they had to in order to make a successful film, and that meant taking risks. LeRoy's idea to combine both black-and-white and color into *The Wizard of Oz* was unique and unheard of. The thirty-five foot tornado sweeping through the sound stage was also considered to be state of the art by the special effects department. LeRoy took a chance and replaced Ebsen to save the studio from wasting thousands of dollars while Ebsen was in recovery. Selznick created an original crane for what is now known as the famous pull-back scene of *Gone with the Wind*. He also fought the Production Code Administration to allow Rhett's final line to remain the way Mitchell wrote it. Both of these films encountered numerous challenges, but in overcoming them, the studios created some of the most memorable pictures of all time.

Publicity, Reviews, and the Box Office

MGM was one of the best at generating a newsworthy buzz around their pictures. The studio's publicity department constantly published updates of *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* in national newspapers in an attempt to keep the public interest high. Mayer recognized that the bigger the hype a film had upon its release, the bigger the numbers were at the box office. MGM's publicity department made sure that the public was informed of both pictures and that the reviews incorporated numerous positive aspects of the films. Even with such effort, in many cases, having a great film does not guarantee its success. In releasing *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*, MGM risked a considerable amount of money that the studio hoped would churn large profits at the box office through the extensive quantity of publicity and reviews the studio released.

The goal for MGM was to create a sense of hysteria for the upcoming release of *The Wizard of Oz*. Publicity was lavish, with the studio spending over a quarter-million dollars to promote the film by means of articles, posters, and stills.^[103] Even before the studio purchased the rights to the book, newspapers were already speculating about the film. *Los Angeles Times* writer Edwin Schallert was one of the first to report on the picture stating, "while there is much chatter about producing Wizard of Oz' with Hollywood actors, it still remains one of the best cartoons subjects ever thought of. They'll do a musical version, of course, but whoever makes the picture will be

stymied in trying to create the ideal imaginative mood."^[104] From February to July 1938, the *Los Angeles Times* updated the public about the stars chosen for the cast. Along with information of the cast, the newspaper also reported on the choice for a director, and Schallert wrote, "notwithstanding that it was assumed Mervyn Leroy would be directing his own production of *The Wizard of Oz*, a different story is now to be told. Norman Taurog is the selection and that step in itself is significant as far as LeRoy is concerned, because it means he will quit directing for the time being and concentrate solely on production."^[105] Taurog later claimed that he was never informed he was selected to direct the picture, which illustrates the lengths that MGM went to promote this film; even before notifying the director that he was to direct the film, the publicity department went to the media to broadcast their selection.

MGM's publicity department sought not only to keep *Oz* fans informed of the film's progress, but also to give appealing trivial side notes about the production, most of which revolved around the Munchkins, in an attempt to present the fun and light hearted side of the Hollywood Dream Factory. The studio notified Hollywood journalist Hedda Hopper of a satirical incident involving the Munchkins where she wrote in her column, "the midgets, on going in for fittings for *Wizard of Oz*, frightened the life out of the desk girl. She heard voices but saw no one until she got up and leaned over the desk and looking down, found three midgets."^[106] Hopper reported on another such story that engaged the Munchkins where she announced, "on the *Wizard of Oz* set they've added 50 school children to the 150 midgets, being sure the kids were the same size. Makes it mighty difficult for Miss MacDonald and her staff of school teachers, because the minute a scene is finished they grab the kids for their lessons, and nine times out of 10 what they find on their laps is a midget."^[107] The studio relished in the unusual circumstances that surrounded the employment of the smaller cast members. The first day the Munchkins came to the set, LeRoy noticed there was a tiny problem and Mayer had the studio newspaper publish an article on the incident. Once the Munchkins arrived to the studio, they had difficulty making their way around the large sets, ultimately prompting LeRoy to hire six large men to the job of "human elevators," or "midget lifters." The article stated, "because of their stature they had to be lifted to platforms and parallels for scenes over the rim of the set. Many of them had to be lifted to drink from ordinary drinking fountains."^[108] MGM found a comic release within the Munchkins that they believed would grab the public's attention, making the production of the film even more interesting to them.

By the summer of 1939, reviews of *The Wizard of Oz* began to appear and influence the public. The film's first review came in June 1939, by the director of the Production Code Administration, Joseph Breen. Breen wrote, "the picture is a superb musical extravaganza, with much of the flavor of *Snow White*, and a special musical score."^[109] The review from Breen was one of the most important reviews since it had the largest influence over the American public, stating which films were wholesome family movies. By mid August, more reviews spread throughout the nation, as its premiere was scheduled for August 17. The majority of the critics praised the picture, such as in *The Washington Post*, which hailed, "*The Wizard of Oz* emphatically belongs among the cinema's most noteworthy and most magnificent achievements."^[110] *Variety* raved about the film and claimed, "nothing comparable has come out of Hollywood in the past few years to approximate the lavish scale of this film musical extravaganza, in the making of which the ingenuity and the inventiveness of technical forces were employed without stint of effort or cost."^[111] Just as MGM had hoped, the majority of film's reviews commended *The Wizard of Oz*, and thus, they anxiously anticipated large numbers at the box office.

The box office profits for *The Wizard of Oz* were very disappointing and not what the studio expected at all. The film was quite successful its opening week, where massive crowds gathered outside of Loew's Theatre in New York to await the arrival of Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland, who were scheduled to perform for audiences in between the film's showings. In the weeks after its premiere, the earnings at the box office greatly declined. Many critics

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believed the film would be an instant hit; *Variety* predicted, "The Wizard of Oz,' which springs from Metro's golden bowl, is likely to perform some record-breaking feats of box office magic."^[112] Despite the decent reviews from critics, the immense cost of the picture combined with a less than satisfactory \$3 million earnings from ticket sales caused the studio a loss of almost a million dollars.^[113] Since the film was aimed more at children, MGM did not take into consideration the reduced cost of a child's ticket at the theatres; that greatly affected ticket sales. MGM spent \$2.7 million to make *The Wizard of Oz*, more than any other production at the studio, which made the film a huge gamble with an end result of almost a million dollars in losses to the studio.

In the case of *Gone with the Wind*, once it was announced that Selznick was to purchase the rights to Mitchell's novel, Civil War fever spread through the media, ignited by several journalists speculating and spreading rumors as to who would be cast in the picture. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* went so far as to choose the entire cast, selecting who they thought would make the ideal characters. The newspaper's choice included an all-star ensemble with the likes of Joan Crawford as Scarlett, Ronald Colman for Rhett, Joan Bennett as Melanie, Fredric March to play Ashley, and Shirley Temple as the choice for Bonnie Butler.^[114] These rumors continued to spread like wildfire, forcing Selznick to step in in an attempt to set the story straight. Frustrated by the fallacies about his film, Selznick wrote to William Wilkerson of *The Hollywood Reporter* in March 1937 to inform, "...George Cukor was preparing an extensive trip to look for new personalities...all searching for Scarletts and Rhetts and Ashleys and Melanies and Bonnies and Pittypatts. If they find them, grand! So far, no luck..."^[115] Selznick intended to notify the public of the picture after everything was in order and the cast was assigned. Due to the public's great interest in the film and the speculation over casting, Selznick felt that he had to report on the little progress to prevent disappointment from the public when the cast was to be announced, that their predictions were wrong.

The less information SIP released on *Gone with the Wind*, the more the media and public sought to fill in the blanks, ultimately creating a larger hype. In early February, Paulette Godard signed a contract with SIP, which led to reporters assuming that she would most likely be cast for the role of Scarlett. In his column, Ed Sullivan wrote, "after all the battling, Paulette Godard joins Dave Selznick and she's a cinch for *Gone with the Wind*.' I think David pulled a smart publicity stunt on the boys."^[116] Once again, Selznick was infuriated with the nationwide gossip of his picture. He wrote to Sullivan defending the very little statements Selznick has made of the film, where he divulged, "I haven't commented on the thousands of mistaken items that have appeared throughout the country in connection with *Gone with the Wind*... I wanted to hold my policy of saying absolutely nothing about *Gone with the Wind* except things that were official and final..."^[117] Since Selznick kept the public in the dark with his anticipated film and only wanted to report on things that were official, the media had to use their imagination to inform the public of the film.

When SIP signed the contracts with MGM that allowed Metro full releasing rights to the film and MGM took over the publicity for *Gone with the Wind*, Selznick's film would be constantly discussed in the media to keep public interest high. For MGM, any publicity was good publicity, as long as it kept people talking about the picture until its release so that they would pay to see it. MGM went to great lengths to market the film. A newspaper in September, wrote that Warner Brothers "announced the loan-out deal providing Bette Davis to play the Scarlett O'Hara role in Selznick-International's "Gone With the Wind" as nearly completed." Later, the article stated, "Selznick representatives commented on the Warner announcement, saying There are no negotiations on."^[118] MGM saw Warner Brothers publicity stunt as an advantage to further create hype for the picture. A week after the article was published, *The Washington Post* printed another article that discussed the Davis controversy, entitled "Extra! World Crisis Settled!" MGM's publicity department aimed to make the alleged casting of Davis a comical statement, which is exactly what appears in *The Washington Post's* article. The column explained the announcement of Davis to be cast as Scarlett created a crisis that involved "heavy fighting over the choice was

reported in many homes."^[119] The article contains an "Opinions From Americans" section where President Roosevelt is included as noting, "I am glad that this grave problem, which has so long affected the happiness and peace of this county, has been settled at last and I believe further bloodshed has been avoided. My administration has been behind Bette from the start and only the Tories and foes of progress wanted anybody else."^[120] Since MGM took a huge financial risk to release SIP's film, they were determined to create as much publicity around the film so that once it was released people would anxiously run to the theatres.

By mid-January 1939, publicity for the picture was sweeping the nation. On January 13, SIP and MGM announced that Vivien Leigh was to play the role of Scarlett, and by the next day, it was in nearly every major newspaper in the country. *The New York Times* made note of what seemed like the never-ending search for the leading role, stating, "the Selznick announcement culminates the most extended and intensive campaign Hollywood has ever seen, beginning in July of 1936 when Selznick purchased the rights to Margaret Mitchell's novel from the proofs and began a search for the leading lady."^[121] A month after the film's cast was released, *Gone with the Wind* made headlines in the newspapers once again, this time reporting on the director Cukor, to be replaced. *The New York Times* explained the change of directors, writing, "Fleming's acquisition was a victory for Clark Gable, who is portraying Rhett Butler in the Margaret Mitchell story as the actor had long expressed a preference for Fleming over Cukor."^[122] The article went on to read, "weight was given to the player's demands when Metro executives saw the result of the first two weeks' shooting and decided that the tempo should be increased."^[123] MGM's publicity department avoided mentioning the disagreements between Cukor and Selznick because Cukor was still under contract to SIP and statements of arguments between the director and producer could have potentially hurt future films at SIP. MGM thought it was best to reveal only part of the truth and claim that the publically adored Gable was not satisfied with the director. The constant publicity, whether good or bad, kept the film in the public's mind so they would be eager to see it.

Reviews of the picture were just what Selznick hoped for; critics praised *Gone with the Wind*. The film's first preview screening was held one September night in a Riverside, CA theatre where the audience was asked to view a film, not knowing anything more than that. The audience cheered when the film's title swept across the theatre screen after awaiting the finished film for two and a half years. The theatre's manager noted, "as near perfect as any picture I have been privileged to see;"^[124] almost all the reviews were similar. A critic for *The Hollywood Reporter* gave a similar statement, "this is more than the greatest motion picture which was ever made. It is the ultimate realization of the dreams of what might be done in every phase of film wizardry, in production, performance, screen writing, photography, and every other multitude of technical operations which enter into the making of a picture."^[125] The *Los Angeles Times* raved the film claiming, "the work is probably the finest co-operative achievement of Hollywood's artists. Its writing, direction, production, and individual performance to say nothing of the stunning loveliness and incredible effects created by its combined technicians stand as a shining tribute to what can be accomplished."^[126] The critically acclaimed reviews of the film only added to the public's excitement and anticipation to see *Gone with the Wind* once it was released, and MGM expected high returns at the box office.

Since the film cost Selznick and MGM a great deal to make, both studios were concerned about profiting from the picture; however, *Gone with the Wind* was an instant hit at the box office. Beginning on December 13, a three-day premiere was held in Atlanta to celebrate the film, the author, and most importantly, the historic city. All eyes were on the Southern city as they hosted the social event of the century. On the evening of the film's premiere on Friday December 15, eighteen thousand fans surrounded Loew's Grand Theater on Peachtree Street, which was to be known as "the headquarters of *Gone with the Wind*" as they anxiously awaited the arrival of Hollywood's biggest stars to the theater.^[127] The theater was filled to its capacity, as 2,051 people sat to watch the

picture.^[128] Tickets for the premiere sold for ten dollars each, an extravagant price considering the average cost of a ticket in 1939 was twenty-five cents. The film proved to be an extraordinary success at its Atlanta premiere. Since 1939, *Gone with the Wind* has been the top grossing film in history, earning more than \$80 million.^[129]

Even though *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* received mass amounts of publicity and good reviews, only *Gone with the Wind* was an instant box office smash hit. Costing just under \$3 million, coupled with its disappointing box office numbers, it took over 20 years for *The Wizard of Oz* to gain back the money it had lost.^[130] The film was re-released in theatres in 1949, where it grossed over \$1.5 million. The picture began earning a profit for MGM and found new Oz fans. It was not until 1956 when CBS negotiated with MGM to broadcast *The Wizard of Oz* twice a year for \$225,000 for each broadcast, that its profit soared.^[131] The film became a classic on CBS and reached out to more generations. Unlike *The Wizard of Oz*, *Gone with the Wind* became an overnight sensation, and had a steady popularity throughout the decades. Releasing these two films was a great risk for the studio, but MGM felt it was a gamble that had to be taken. MGM spent thousands of dollars to ensure both films were to be a success by greatly publicizing them, hoping to spark an interest across the nation.

The Wizard of Oz and *Gone with the Wind* are two of the most cherished films of all time. In 1939, more films had been released than ever before, and these two films beat out hundreds of others at the Academy Awards. *Gone with the Wind* received thirteen nominations and eight wins, including best actress in a leading role, best actress in a supporting role, best director, and best picture. *Gone with the Wind* received more wins than any other film in history. *The Wizard of Oz* received six nominations and won three: best original score, best original song, and best juvenile actress. Even though they were made over 70 years ago, filmmakers today still study the techniques and special effects that were used in those two films. Despite the difficulties both films endured and the many risks MGM took in releasing the films, *Gone with the Wind* was much more successful than the *Wizard of Oz*, which proves that the studios did not know whether a film was going to be successful or not. Every film made and released was a gamble to the studio.

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[131] Harnetz, *The Making of the Wizard of Oz*, 290.